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**"The Love Song of J.
Alfred Prufrock" as
an Emblem of the
Modern Writer's
Dilemma"**

ملخص :

يسلط البحث الضوء على العلاقة المتناقضة ما بين الكاتب الحديث والوسط الاجتماعي التي تتصف بالتنافر والتجاذب حيث يحاول الكاتب أن يتجنب التأثير بهذا الوسط المتغير مع حاجته له في أن معاً. إن دراسة متفحصة لقصيدة تي. أس. إيليويت "قصيدة حب جي. ألفرد بروفروك" تكشف عن معضلة الفنان البروفروكي الحديث القلق من التأثير بالوسط الاجتماعي والمتسائل دوماً عن قيمة الإبداع الفني في المجتمع ومدى تقبله للإبداع الفردي. هذه المخاوف تؤدي إلى التوغل في مسائل مثل صدق العاطفة والمعنى والإبداع الفني. يقدم الباحثان رؤية جديدة للقصيدة كما يوظفان بعض النظريات الحديثة في تحليلها و يقدمان تحليلاً مختلفاً لبعض الأبيات. يأمل الباحثان أن تثير هذه الدراسة قراءات جديدة في الشعر الحديث وبخاصة شعر إيليويت الذي يركز على هذه المعضلة لدى الفنان الحديث.

Abstract

This paper highlights the ambivalent relationship between the modern artist and his social context that is influenced by social change and which affects literary creativity and appreciation. It argues that T. S. Eliot's "The

Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" reveals such a dilemma. The Prufrockian artist exhibits the modernist apprehension of the social context, questions the value of artistic creation, and tries constantly to assert his individualism. The question of 'sincerity' and artistic creation becomes vital in such an amorphous context. The researchers provide a new perspective of looking at the poem as well as new interpretations to some of its verses in the light of some modern critical theories. Hopefully, this paper would generate further readings into modern poetry, especially Eliot's, that depict the conflict between the artist's individual talent and Tradition.

The Artist in an Amorphous Modern Setting

"No! I am not prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be"

("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" L.111)¹

In this line Prufrock expresses his contemplations about his distinctive status as a modern artist. In the poem, Eliot reflects the modern writer's predicament in his struggle to assert his identity and to shake off all limiting aspects like form and meaning since he views meaning as a limitation. In his discussion of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot writes about the "panorama of futility and anarchy" within contemporary history. This "panorama" exists in Eliot's poem *Prufrock* (Kermode 1975: 177). Due to his admiration of the new mythical method used in Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot used interior monologues and free verse in his poems (Kermode, p.175). It is our intention to trace the main characteristics of modernism in this poem, which expresses the modern experience from literary, psychological and social perspectives.

Writing about T.S. Eliot is problematic for his works have been under scrutiny and investigation since the second decade of the twentieth century. The researchers recognize this challenge, and yet feel there is a continuous need to revise the concept of modernism through Eliot's

¹ All citations from Eliot's poems are quoted from T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays*. London: Faber and Faber, 1969. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" will be referred to hereafter as *Prufrock*.

poem *Prufrock*¹ The contribution of this article lies in studying *Prufrock* with an approach that intermingles the theory and the application of modernism in an elucidate manner that targets teachers and students of modern literature alike. Besides offering an interpretation of the poem that deviates from the complexity known in a traditional academic study, the article offers a fresh descriptive reading of the poem through Deconstructive, Feminist and Reader-oriented critical theories, and maneuvers within alternative possible interpretations offered by the text. It also offers new interpretations to some verses of the poem.

Part of the article explores the dilemma of the Prufrockian artist who resists any interpretative approach even when under the critical eyes of his gender-biased critics (women) thus exposing the challenging application of a feminist explication to the poem. This paper tries to highlight the precarious relationship between the fear of

¹ *Prufrock* generated a wide spectrum of studies and analyses from poets and critics alike from the time it was published. From Ezra Pound's admiration of the poem as a reflection of real society (Eliot 1985:420), the poem was under scrutiny, studied from different perspectives-personal, social, modernist, etc. In his book *T. S. Eliot: the Poet and His Critics*, Robert Canary highlights the prominent studies on *Prufrock* up to the 1980's. See "Prufrock as Persona," pp. 84-96 of the same book (Chicago: American Library Association, 1982). Also, see. *T.S. Eliot Critical Assessments: Memories, Interviews, Contemporary Responses*. Vol.1 edited by Graham Clarke, (London: Christopher Helm, 1990), and Graham Clarke (ed.). *T.S. Eliot Critical Assessments: Early Poems and the Waste Land*. Vol. II (London: Christopher Helm, 1990).

sexual impotency, a hesitation in artistic creativity caused by the feminist criticism that compels Prufrock to revise his literary ideas on the one hand, and the need to emphasise the autonomy of literary creation and its evasion of any interpretation on the other. Further, it explores the radical feminist sexual politics within the poem employed by the mystified "women" and argues that there is an inversion of the gender status within the text that helps generate the problematic status of Prufrock as a 'proclaimed' masculine writer.¹ Furthermore, it explores the conflicting signs produced by the poem that frustrate any attempt, by the reader, to construct a coherent shape for the poem externally, and the intentions of Prufrock within the poem itself.²

¹ Previous studies of *Prufrock* by Tony Pinkey and others concentrated on Prufrock's fragmentary sensibility and internal fear that disables him from any coherent communication with the other sex. This article, however, adds a literary dimension to this concept of fragmentation. See Tony Pinkey's *Women in the Poetry of T.S. Eliot* (London: Macmillan, 1984) and Morja Palmer's *Men and Women in the Early Poetry of T.S. Eliot*, (Lund: Lund University Press, 1996), and Carol Chris' "Gender, Voice and Figuration in Eliot's Early Poetry," printed in Ronald Bush (ed.), *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 23-37.

² The inconclusive end leaves us in the same status of Prufrock at the beginning of the poem and in the same situation of "Do I dare" (L.45), "how should I begin?" and "And should I then presume?" (L1.68-69). It is the intention of Prufrock to give his authorial intentions and literary creation an elusive amorphous status to keep both the listener and the reader in anticipation without giving them a chance to reach any final meaning.

Initially, the poem reflects the dilemma of Prufrock, an emblem of the modern artist. This artist oscillates between the individual need to maintain traditional artistic ideals and the social pressure, to change them in a time when most modernist literary works depicted the artist as a settled figure within his social milieu.¹ It is true that certain modernist works emphasised the willful alienation of the artist, but the case of *Prufrock* is different because the artist shifts between the need to be accepted by society and the alienation that his art imposes upon him. This paper attempts to read the poem as a depiction of the tension between modernist literary ideas and the pressures of the transient society on the artist, a matter which renders the poem different from the other modernist literary works.

Furthermore, the Prufrockian author, an impressionist artist, continues his rejection of any interpretation or coherent understanding of his work. He practices an evasive mechanism to deny his authorial dominance over the text.² This rejection includes Eliot's

¹ In *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw and *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce, the artist has defined his own mission and responsibility within his social context. Even though they agree upon the contempt of society, Prufrock differs from Stephen Dedalus and Professor Higgins, because he is confused not only about his own external limitations and responsibilities, but even about his internal artistic self.

² Prufrock might be an emblem of both the creator and the interpreter. He reads himself and fears misinterpretation. The lines "That is not what I meant at all / That is not it at all" (Ll. 97-98) reveal Prufrock's fear of misrepresentation. It also represents his desire to and simultaneous fear of generating a "Writerly" text.

own authorial intention and that of Prufrock who also has similar intentions and who does not resume, begin or finish his own literary text due to Prufrock's fear of the transformation of his text into what Roland Barthes calls a "Writerly" text. This presentation reflects Eliot's complex aesthetic sensibility, his artistic skepticism and anxieties regarding the new social context and its effect on writing.

The connection between the writer, a sensitive parameter of his society, and his/her society is a persistent concern in any critique or analysis of literary works. Usually, literary theories highlight society's role in shaping the writer's perspective of the form and the content of a literary work. Nevertheless, it is not easy to express the relationship between the writer and his/her society since social ideas become more complex once engaged in a literary work.¹

The relationship between the writer and the society in the modern age has been under constant scrutiny by critics, attempting to examine its variables and parameters. Poets and writers alike tried to explain the uniqueness of such a situation. T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats, D.H. Lawrence, among many other modern

¹ Welleke and Warren propose that the relationship between literature and society is complex because it means taking into consideration factors such as "the sociology of the writer, the social contents of the works themselves, and the influence of literature on society." Yet they agree that literature is derived, directly or indirectly, from society regardless of the implications of the cause-effect relationship between the two. *Theory of Literature*. (London: Penguin Books, 1963), p.96.

writers-critics wrote to elucidate and defend their literary works against the accusations of ambiguity, elitism, and remoteness from reality.¹ Later on, I.A. Richards, F. R. Leavis and W. Empson led the examination of Modernism from all different aspects -aesthetic, social, psychological, etc. The literature on this subject is immense since "modernism" has been one of the most prolific and intense stages of writing.²

In his discussion of the dilemma of the modern writer, Peter Hitchcock maintains that classes in society were only defined in socio-economical terms and claims that the modern "elite" writers in some cases resisted writing about petite bourgeoisie classes in their literary works (Hitchcock 2000:25). Although there were writers in the late Victorian period who felt the pressure to meet the

¹ For instance, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence express some modernist ideas in their novels; while Woolf believes that the modernist novel must abandon the concept of the "finished novel" due to the relativity of the modern self (Woolf 1976:88), D. H. Lawrence advocates radical changes in the art of the novel in terms of the themes, structure of the plot and characterisation since the human nature itself has changed (Clarke 1996:28-29).

² For example, Richard Ellman and Charles Fredrick's *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature*, (New York, Oxford University Press: 1963) exposes many of the influences, literary and non-literary, that shaped the Modern movement. In Sally Wehmeier's (ed.) *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, the word 'modern' means "contemporary, up-to-date or of the present or recent times" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.855.

demands of the public and those of the literary market, their attempts to free literary imagination from the social realm of concern remained unique and isolated ones.¹

The metamorphosis of society affected the modern writers in terms of the fragmentation of traditional social hierarchy and the disappearance of culture. The traditional social hierarchy in England influenced literature whether literary works were produced under the patronage of the higher class or through providing a common background of reference. In addition, culture stood for the expression of the collective sensibility, when the artist contributed to a shared view of his society. Culture meant the pressures and forces working on the writer and shaping his expression in an artistic manner.² As a modern artist, Eliot reflects that: "[r]adical change in poetic form is likely to be the symptom

¹ For instance, Ian Small thinks that Oscar Wilde was one of these writers who wrote according to the demands of the literary market in his age thus promoting his art to be more individualistic as well as more appealing to the tastes of his readers in a late stage of Victorianism. "The Economics of Taste: Literary Market and Literary Value in the Late Nineteenth Century," *English Literature in Transition*, 1996, 39: 1, pp. 14-16.

² Matthew Arnold represents a conventional case of the Victorian cultural criticism. He believed that there is an obvious connection between the status of culture as an expression of the collective sensibility of society and the status of literature as a part of the social sensibility. See the chapter "Sweetness and Light" in *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism and Friendship's Garland* (New York: AMS Press: 1970), pp. 5-43.

of some very much deeper change in society and in the individual" (Eliot 1987:75). Therefore, the change in the modern context played an influential part in the rebirth of the modernist trait in literature that expresses the new "sense of reality" in the twentieth century (Read 1963: 223).

Social change affected literary conventions and caused drastic changes in literary imagination. The modern artists committed themselves to the new spirit, a historical moment that freed imagination from the framework of society. The social and the cultural changes primarily caused the transformation of the concept of the literary artifact. In short, such changes liberated the imagination from the conventions that regularized it in previous ages. The writers felt that this apprehensive transformation caused a crisis, a historical jump or an apocalypse that shocked them beyond imagination and articulation. They also felt that external reality is moving in a pace faster than and away from the human perception of objects.¹

1 Modern literature is an attempt to keep with the new age and to find a suitable expression for the cultural deterioration. The modern situation was different from all previous ages since the writer had to deal with a society that was not hierarchal after the collapse of culture. This collapse was a focal point for the cultural critics of modern literature that represents the thematic design of the ideas and the framework of imagination in a literary text and the meaning of its communication among individuals in society. The rearranging of society in terms of classes and values caused confusion and chaos. For instance, T.S. Eliot describes this chaos as "a heap of broken images of modern ugliness" "The Waste Land" printed in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p.61, L.22, and the following two lines of W.B. Yeats express the same idea: "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; /Mere anarchy is loose upon the world". W.B. Yeats' "The Second Coming" printed in *DiYanni Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, and Drama* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2 2000), p.664. Ll. 3-4.

Sean Lucy regards Eliot as one of the modern artists who wrote in an attempt to convey a paradoxical meaning in modern literature. He alleges that Eliot's "poetry is concerned with a search for the true meaning or meaninglessness hidden under the exterior aspect of things: the search, more particularly, for the reality of the human situation" (Lucy 1960:142). Lucy adds that Eliot's "attempt to discover meaning in the past, in tradition, is part of this quest".(Lucy 1960:142). To Lucy, Eliot's "earlier poems show some attempt to find significance in human relationships, but they are really a report of the failure of this attempt" (Lucy 1960: 143). Lucy's claims highlight Eliot's eventual realization of the futility and meaninglessness of the modern context. The same futility and meaninglessness of the modern context exist in other modern literary works such as Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in which characters are incapable of action, and, like Prufrock, seem to be waiting but without accomplishing anything of significance because they are more or less crucified, and entrapped, under the tree. Their situation is similar to Prufrock's since he feels that he is "sprawling on a pin,/ When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall" (LI, 57-58).

Further, the same meaninglessness and futility exist in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in which Marlow feels the insignificance, entrapment, futility and absurdity of human existence after his experience in the Congo and he envies people for their safety in ignorance and wonders why European colonizers seem, like the characters in *Waiting for Godot*, to be waiting meaninglessly for something indefinite. Further, they (meaninglessness and

futility) are evident in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* where everything amounts to "nothing" or to "boom". Furthermore, Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men", influenced by Existentialism, reflects the insignificance and the entrapment of the modern man and the futility and meaninglessness of his existence, and, therefore, he ended his poem with the claim that the world does not end with a "bang" but ends with a "whimper." The modern artist is more or less like an actor in a play staged in the Absurd Theatre in which he struggles to make sense out of nonsense.

Eliot expresses a new idea of modern writing in a traditional perspective in his essay "Tradition and Individual Talent," when he describes the age historically by formulating his own concept of literary traditions, a matter that reflects the writer's awareness, like many others in the pre-modern era, of the progression of the age. To Eliot, the historical sense means bridging the gap between the world of things and that of internal feeling and perception, thus expressing a relationship between the artist and society by exploiting the perceived personal experience. He claims that "[t]his historical sense, which is the sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional;" it is also "what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, and of his contemporaneity" (Eliot 1955:14). In other words, the writer is to find a subjective meaning for external objects so that he can explain and explore, rather than imitate and show, things around him; that is, to find a contemporary equivalence in the material molded in poetry.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" starts with a description of the fog dominating the half-desolate streets. The depiction of the fog as an animal that has a tongue and can rub its back upon window panes reflects a process of 'defamiliarization' that is peculiar to modernism in conveying an image of the city's configuration, which is overshadowed by the poet's own indecision or uncertainty. To Kathryn Hume, "[t]he author creates worlds that are skewed, worlds we know to be distorted, but which are so cleverly twisted that we cannot say 'this is an exaggeration, but that is true'" (Hume 1984:125). Moreover, in the chapter "Gynocritics," Ruthven concludes the feminist criticism is obsessed with mystifying objects, because the universe and even language are "androcentric" (Ruthven 1986: 93-128). Prufrock mentions the "half-deserted streets" (L.4) that "follow like a tedious argument/Of insidious intent/To lead you to the overwhelming question..." (Eliot 1969:13, Ll. 8-10). These lines reflect the uncertainty, futility, and yet, the final meaninglessness that dominates not only the speaker but also the meaning of the poem itself.

The fog reflects the 'uncertainty' since it represents the gray area between two binary opposites, light/dark, day/night, and conscious/unconscious. It also represents the mental confusion of Prufrock himself. This confusion can also denote Prufrock's internal blindness. According to Kathryn Hume, "[t]he author usually demonstrates these inescapable weaknesses [as uncertainty and confusion] to his protagonists and expects us to apply the message to ourselves and our own blindness" (Hume 1984:125). Further, the yellow colour of the fog indicates Prufrock's

cowardice, also stated in the lines "Do I dare/ disturb the Universe?"(L.45-46).

To Robert E. Cook, Eliot in this poem "is giving the lie to Emerson's 'Self-Reliance'". He explains that Emerson did not "take into account the plain fact that the adult consciousness is circumscribed"(Cook 1985:46-47). For Emerson, the feelings of "self trust" and "nonconformity" with social or religious ideas initiate artistic creativity (Emerson 1999: 397). Emerson's transcendentalist ideas always affirmed the positive and romantic traits within the individual. Nevertheless, Prufrock who cannot go beyond or rebel even against his own inner feelings that seclude him from reality negates Emerson's individualistic Transcendentalism. In other words, Prufrock is not happy with having free will. He seems to desire to be, like the hollow men, without free will "behaving as the wind behaves" ("The Hollow Men" L.35) to escape the responsibility and the consequences of his decisions.

Deconstructively speaking, the modernist uncertainty is evident in the writer's constant attempts to express new ideas in new methods or establish the correct or desired work. It is a continuous process of recoding and decoding or, in the Derridian sense, constructing and deconstructing to escape the much-hated fixity. The lines: "There will be time to murder and create"(L.28), "And for a hundred visions and revisions"(L.33) reflect this process. Only by escaping the social context as a limiting 'center' will the modern writer be able to give full 'play', to use the Derridian term, to his genius (Derrida 1978:280). The fixity of form would kill the artistic ability of the modern artist and rob him of his authentic, genuine talent. Furthermore,

according to Ronald Barthes, writing “by refusing to assign a ‘secret’, an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity”. He explains that this activity “is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law” (Barthes 2000:150). So, the artist is trying to break free from all constraints and limitations. He is trying to go beyond any transcendental signified that might cause a limitation of form and meaning.

According to Derrida, the stoppage of the ‘play’ of the ‘centre’ means “death”; in other words, “the absence of play and differance [is] another name for death” (Derrida 1978:297). Clearly, form is limiting to the artist. By form we mean established literary genres and standard traditional modes of writing. Indeed, the modern artist in general, and Eliot or Prufrock in particular, wish to escape all the limitations of society. Prufrock wishes to escape from tradition and form:

The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
 And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
 When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
 Then how should I begin
 To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
 And how should I presume?" (Ll. 55-61).

To use Roland Barthes’ terminology, it seems Prufrock wishes to produce a “Writerly Text”, that has no limiting ‘centre’ of signification functioning as a ‘transcendental signified’, and yet he is anxious that a “Writerly” text would generate misunderstanding and result

in his death as an artist as well as the death of the text. To Barthes, writing is "the destruction of every voice, every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away". It is also "the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body of writing"¹ (Heath 1977:142). Derrida notes that "only by means of a series of words that are faulty" and which he "erased in passing, in measure, regularly" yet "leaving them to the force of their tracing, the wake of their tracement (*tracement*), the force (without force) of a trace that will have allowed passage for the other" was writer "able to arrive at the end" of his "phrase"² (Kamuf 1991:424). Fredrick Jameson describes modern literary works as "cancelled" (Jameson 2000: 183), which is, more or less, an alternative to Derrida's 'erasure'. This 'erasure' or "cancellation" causes the 'play' of the 'centre,' the opposite of which would cause fixity of form that leads to 'death' —a matter which explains Profruck's constant desire to "murder and create".

The artist's freedom of expression and imagination is limited as if he is a cockroach "sprawling on a pin" (L.57), and the process of creative writing is referred to as the spitting out of the butt-ends of the artist's life and beliefs. This imagery recalls Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" in which Kafka's own creative writing is

¹ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in Stephen Heath (ed.), *Image-Music-Text*. (London: Fontana, trans., 1977).

² Jacques Derrida, "At this very Moment in This Work Here I am," in Peggy Kamuf (ed.), *Between the Blind*, Trans. Ruben Berezdivin (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

depicted as the efforts of a cockroach to walk freely among established furniture and to walk on the ceiling rather than the floor as an indication of the escape from tradition. The artist is apparently destined to remain trapped in a gray area between two worlds: the world of reality and that of creativity. He cannot bring himself to escape the harsh reality, and neither will he allow himself to indulge in the world he creates as an escape from reality.

The following lines from another celebrated poem of Eliot best explain the aforementioned entrapment:

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow ...

("The Hollow Men", Ll. 72-76)

Eliot's persona here establishes the difference between the theory and the practice and the ideal and the real. The "Shadow" symbolizes the gray area in which the artist is entrapped. It is also the gray area between what the artist meant and what his words suggested to his readers. Further, it is representative of the fog, another gray area, separating the conscious and the unconscious. Hence, we observe the excessive focus upon Prufrock's uncertainty, hesitation and the impotency of his artistic creativity. Further, the city, which is depicted more like a maze, represents the human brain with its widening paths and intricate webs to suggest uncertainty and confusion.

The same uncertainty is the reason for the metaphysical fear in the poem, just like the question that Prufrock does not dare to ask. It is evident in his futile walk into rooms or aimless streets. The artist is aware of the risk he has to take to assert his individual talent. He knows that this assertion would cause his death as an artist. The many references to him as not being Prince Hamlet, John the Baptist or a prophet indicate this fear. The uncertainty of the poem is reflected in the reference to Hamlet that invokes the famous question "To be or not to be" (Kennedy and Gioia 2002: 1616, L.57). Prufrock defers the interpretation of his text by insisting that his meaning was different from the one derived by the readers in a similar way to Hamlet's procrastination about avenging his father. To Hamlet, killing Claudius will result in Hamlet's own death. Similarly, giving meaning to Prufrock's text will result in the murder of the text and the murder of the artist.¹ In addition, the reference to John The Baptist indicates the death of the artist because the artist's head will also be brought upon the plate. The artist is afraid that he will lose the greatness and admiration with which society has endowed him. Hence, he is torn between being and not being.

The artist's death could also represent the "Death of the Author" in Modernism. It also might represent the

¹ See the previous argument on page 10 on the way fixity of form and meaning results in death.

tension between the "Readerly" text¹ and the "Writerly" text using Roland Barthes' terminology. In other words, Prufrock wants to generate a "Writerly" text in which his identity will be lost and he will not be held morally responsible for his literary product, because he dies as an author in such a text. However, Prufrock is anxious that his "Writerly" text might cause misunderstanding or misrepresentation. He, therefore, keeps repeating the words "That's not what I meant at all" (L.97). To Roland Barthes, "to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 2000: 150). However, Prufrock seems to strongly believe in this myth since the creation of a "Writerly" text necessitates the death of the author and the death of the "Readerly" Text.

Stuart Hall claims that when people search for their identity they "tend to isolate themselves ... as if they are running to the desert," and they can also "make their homes the deserts they run into"(Hall 1997:3). Hall suggests that:

[T]he desert is thought of as nothingness waiting to become something, if only for a while; meaninglessness waiting to be given meaning if only a passing one; space without contours, ready to accept any contour offered if only until other contours are offered; space not scarred with

1 A readerly text "is one wherein the reader need not 'write' or 'produce' his or her own meanings but one where one can find, by passive means, meaning 'ready-made'". In Barthes, Roland. *S/Z: An Essay*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974. *Internet Explorer*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland_Barthes.

past furrows, yet fertile with expectations of sharp blades; virgin land yet to be ploughed and tilled; the land of the perceptual beginning the place-no-place whose name and identity is not-yet." (Hall 1997:3)

Hence, the modern writer, like Prufrock, is escaping into half-deserted streets, into a wasteland, into his own spiritual desert where his identity, his meaning, and the form of his text will be amorphous like that of the desert. The lines: "It is impossible to say just what I mean! / But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in pattern on a screen" emphasise this idea of the temporal meaning/form/identity as well as the idea of self-seclusion from reality (Ll. 104-105). Since the artist fails to express what he means, i.e. he fails to express reality as it is, but he can only reflect the instant impression it leaves on his mind and which is constantly changing by the effect of the "magic lantern".

In addition, the *temporary* mental modern text apparently exists in a liquid state in the mind of the artist¹ and is constantly affected by a stream of consciousness. Consequently, it assumes shape and meaning for a short period of time because the text changes constantly according to the impression of the artist, and, therefore, the Prufrockian artist, like modern impressionist artists, keeps reminding us "That's not what I meant, at all" (L. 110). The lines also indicate that language falls short before expressing the inexpressible within Prufrock's mind. Language in the modern context loses its communicative ability. This is another characteristic of the theatre of the

¹ The researchers argued before that the city with its streets and widening paths represent the brain.

Absurd evident in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in the broken dialogues of the characters especially those of Estragon and Valdimir. It is also present in Eliot's "The Hollow Men": "Our dried voices, when/We whisper together/Are quiet and meaningless" (L1.5-7). Again, futility and meaninglessness characterize the modern context.

Hume maintains that the way "a reader can be robbed of assurances is by irresolved contradictions, where interpretation of reality clashes with another internal interpretation" (Hume 1984:125). This underlines the collapse of communication that alienates the artist. She further argues that "the inadequacy of our means of communication" would result in the inability to "escape the solipsistic prison of our individuality" (Hume 1984:125). The artist himself is unable to comprehend or maintain the shape or meaning of the text and this leads to his isolation and alienation. Further, Lucy comments that "[i]n 'Prufrock' at the very beginning of the *Collected Poems* we are faced immediately with the collapse of 'normal' values and the fear of real ones.... This theme, of lost or failed significance, is applied to all the man-woman relationship of the earlier poems" (Lucy 1960: 143). The lost or failed significance reflects the futility that characterizes modern writings. For futility to be meaningful, it must be meaningless.¹

¹ In his article "The Meaning of the Meaningless", Paul Tillich argues that the state of being meaningless is essential in modern literature because such state is part of the "self-affirmation" in the face of despair of the modern age. Therefore, "the act of accepting meaninglessness is in itself a meaningful act," printed in Albercht *et. al* (eds.) *The Sociology of Literature and Arts: A Reader*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1976), p. 946.

Therefore, the ugly and the fragmented must exemplify the relationship between writing and reality whether it is social or psychological.

Hence, the struggle for a modern form of writing can be abbreviated into one word, 'Meaning'. The meaning of the work becomes amorphous due to the writer's search for significance in the work (i.e. creating a different aesthetic vision or constructing a coherent personality). To modernists, the annoying questions are: how to establish the meaning of a literary work if what it attempts to reveal is an indefinite entity? How to imagine the unimaginable? Obviously, modernism tried to maintain equilibrium between being a literary movement and a social phenomenon expressing the spirit of the age, and trying to preserve its imaginative sanity by rejecting the external social chaos. Ironically, and despite this rejection, modernism needed chaos to maintain the futility of meaning.

Prufrock's schizophrenic self manifested in the line "let us go then, you and I" (L.1) leaves the reader vexed as Prufrock's continuous hesitation extends to the process of creating and murdering. While deleting his own authorial intentions from the work, he alienates himself from the text: "That is not what I meant at all/ That is not it, at all" (Ll.97-98). Thus, the Prufrockian self in the literary creation is diluted with the disappearance of the "I" leaving the reader to understand and to form his own meaning of the text in isolation from any authorial influences. However, this understanding is blocked since the poem does not establish any meaning. On the other hand, the reader is continually reminded of the fallacy of the author through the rhetorical

questions by the Prufrockian artist now and then." Do I dare" (L.38), "And should I then presume?/ And how should I begin"(Ll.68-69), to maintain that evasive fallacy between him and what he creates.

Eliot explains that "poetry involved an extinction of the personality of the author", and hence, "the use of an inscrutable *persona*". In addition, his theory of "*the objective correlative*" suggests that the literary work is a product of "a collaborative effort that would be different for different readers so that it would suggest no agreed story or interpretation" since "its relationship to what went on in the poet's mind is impenetrably obscure and irrelevant" (Kermode *et al.* 1973: 1971). This suggests that establishing a direct relationship between the poet and his artifact is an arduous task, and undermines the possibilities of meaning in the modern literary work.¹ Moreover, it furthers the previous argument about Prufrock's anxiety regarding the "Readerly" or the "Writerly" text since Eliot's definition of the "Objective Correlative" is extremely similar to Barthes' "Writerly" text.²

¹ For example, see Stanly Fish's "Interpreting Variorum" printed in David Lodge & Nigel Wood's *Modern Literary Criticism: A Reader* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), and David Bleich's "The Subjective Character of Critical Interpretation," printed in K. M. Newton (ed.) *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory : A Reader* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

² "[T]he goal of any 'writerly text' for Barthes is ... to make the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text." Further, the "Writerly" text is different from the "Readerly" one since the Readerly is a "product" and the "Writerly" text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world is traversed,

As he gives his own interpretation of the new status of imagination in modern art, Stephen Spender, the poet-critic, argues that "the modern environment" is a "destructive element" from which the writer tries to come up with an "answer" (Spender 1953:11-12). He explains that "[t]he 'answer' of each writer is as different from that of other writers as all personal worlds are different: but those differences have in common the absoluteness of the idea of creative individuality" (Spender 1953:12). Therefore, Prufrock refutes, or at least tries to negate, certain ideas of the Reader-Oriented theory that maintain that readers can derive a meaning or an understanding of the text by filling the gaps of indeterminacy in an attempt to understand the author's experience which is ingrained within the text. In addition, the repetition of the rhetorical lines "women come and go/ talking of Michelangelo" (Ll.13-14) and the questions in the poem are part of Prufrock's evasive mechanism that aims to shift the authorial responsibility of reading and interpreting the text to the feminist critics.

Admitting that "I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker," (L. 84) Prufrock probably suggests that experimenting with a modern method that people might not admire might cause his death as an artist. Even if he dies as

intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages". Barthes explains that reading is a "form of work" and "not a parastical act, the reactive complement of a writing". In Barthes, Roland. *S/Z: An Essay*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974. *Internet Explorer*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland_Barthes.

an artist and is resurrected as one by other people, he would compare himself to "Lazarus come from the dead" (L. 94). However, he is anxious that people would celebrate him for the wrong reasons, because they might not have understood what he meant in/by his literary work. He also expresses "his fear of being misunderstood In this too, Prufrock has not profited from the teaching of Emerson" of self-reliance and nonconformity in being creative (Cook 1985:46), and hence the repetition of the lines "That is not it at all, / That is not what I meant, at all" (Ll.109-110). This shows the anxiety of the writer about the ambiguity of his text and fear of being framed in a limiting form. It also embodies the Prufrockian belief, which is against the death of the author, that the author should maintain the authority over the text, and that its meaning should only be provided by him.

Modernism, then, does not answer questions.¹ It only asks them. Prufrock talks about a question that is dropped on his plate and to this question no answer is given. He simply wanders "how should I presume?" (L.54), and "how should I begin?" (L.59) This question reflects Prufrock's (or the artist's) uncertainty about his literary creation, and hence, the reference to the constant process of murdering and creating. Consequently, Prufrock's creativity remains idle since the muse dies among the voices inside

¹ According to Irving Howe, Modernism is "a dynamism of asking and of learning not to reply. The past was devoted to answers, the modern period confines itself to questions We present ourselves, we establish our authenticity by the questions we allow to torment us" Irving Howe, *Decline of The New* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1971), pp. 8-9.

his brain. His brain fails to comprehend the voice of the muse since it is too far. Thus, he loses not only his touch with reality but also with his mental creativity: "I know the voices dying with the dying fall/Beneath the music from the farther room" (Ll. 52-53). The Prufrockian artist is bound to remain impotent mentally, sexually, physically, socially, and, most importantly, artistically.¹

Like the boy in Joyce's "Araby", Prufrock's sexual desires remain frustrated for his fear is metaphysical. Prufrock is sexually impotent because his hesitation cripples him as if the "overwhelming question" turns into an

¹ The reference to the mermaids singing represents the sound of the muses, but Prufrock is worried that they will not sing to him, and hence, he would die as an artist, and he will not be given wreaths. The reference to "the human voices wake us, and we drown" (L.131) again reflects the artist's anxiety of losing individual talent and drowning in the multitudes of human voices. Thus, the poem ends in a note of negating a romantic idea with "the mermaids singing, each to each" and refusing to sing to him like they sang to Ulysses and his men- more like an imaginative inspiration rather than a real one. The deflation of Prufrock's romantic exaggerated aspirations at the end of his internal journey of self-discovery near the imaginary sea represents his failure in establishing a meaningful contact with the other sex, even in an imaginary context. The sea, though imaginary, reflects the frustrated baptism or initiation of Prufrock into sexual experience. When he drowns, he is shrinking back into his self-inflicted isolation, into a cocoon or an ivory tower. His watery end is also indicative of spiritual death, of sexual impotence and frustrated initiation into artistic creativity, love, sex, and Manhood

Oedipus complex¹ that frustrates any chance of sexual gratification. Thus, Prufrock is pushed to another level of fear, the sexual one. The image of the fog as an animal with a tongue that rubs its back against the window panes emphasises the sexual connotations since the fog and the city exist in Prufrock's mind (libido)². In effect, the Prufrockian artist, consciously or unconsciously, is linking sexual intercourse (physical creation) with the act of literary creation, as if Prufrock's sexual desire is sublimated into the act of artistic creativity. In other words, Prufrock is substituting sexual affairs with women into similar affairs with literary texts.

Prufrock is always annoyed as well as aimless in his actions and thoughts; therefore, his presumption and initiation never take place. He is doomed, like Hamlet, to suffer from the inability to make a decision (abulia) (Guerin 1979: 131). Similarly, Cook argues, "Prufrock carries self-consciousness to the pathological extreme of paranoic inaction and paralysis"(Cook 1985:45). This hesitation is due to the futility, meaninglessness and break of communication that characterise the modern context. Prufrock initiates his creative process, but it, like his own fears, will not lead him to any definite conclusion. Certainly, Prufrock's internal suffering cannot reach a tragic intensity like that of Hamlet. As an artist, he compares

¹ This claim is strengthened when Prufrock compares himself with Hamlet who is diagnosed with the same complex.

² The researchers argued before that the fog stands for the gray area between the conscious and the unconscious.

himself to Hamlet but fails since he does not possess the magnanimity and eloquence of a tragic hero.

It can also be argued that the 'Prufrockian' artist is apparently not sure whether to meet the demands of the public or to write the text that he really wants. Consequently, abhorrence and resistance to society characterize the writer's predicament in the modern age, since it did not reflect a trustworthy and reliable image that could provide him with standardized interesting concepts and subject-matters that he can use in his work. Furthermore, the writer has to control, if possible, the demands of the public to change the standards of the work from being aesthetical to commercial. In other words, the 'sincere' writer refuses the prostitution of his art.¹

Many pre-modern writers considered the reflection of the writer's psyche an essential element of injecting reality into the literary artifact- an element of sincerity. Yet

¹ The theme of literature has always been the human self and/or the social context, the reason being the friction between the two spheres, the public (social) and the individual (private), or what is known as the human experience. George Whalley calls the interaction (clash) between the private and the public as the "interface" meaning the level of the artist's interaction with reality that constructs the experience and gives it a peculiarity of its own (Whalley 1955:27). He explains that "this order [or nature] of experience is its own argument, carries its own proof within itself, is at once an event of value and knowing", thus proving that artists search for personal or collective identity in their literary works (Whalley 1955:31). Yet, this condition does not necessarily exist in the new age since one of the binary opposites individual/society might be missing. Hence, there would be no determinate sense of an individuated/social reality.

'Sincerity' is controversial for the modernists since it implies undesired moral implications in writing.¹ Further, how could the writer be sincere when he keeps evading and hiding behind the many voices within the work? Herbert Read claims that the modernist work cannot be sincere or authentic since every aspect of the modern creativity resists being sincere (Read 1968:27-28). The redefinition of concepts of 'self' and 'reality' in modern ways signified no direct relationship with common accepted ideas, values or parameters of behaviour personally or socially. Thus, one cannot really establish a sense of sincerity, as the concept of sincerity itself is vague.

If the artist decides to have self-fulfillment by focusing on his individuality rather than the demands of society, he would then have to face the fury of society, and hence the line "Do I dare/ Disturb the universe?"(Ll. 45-46). Prufrock must challenge the Emersonian ideals of the artistic creativity in his individuality and creation. Modernist writers reacted toward the changed social context, because they were trying to reflect their authentic artistic perspective(s). Spender argues that "[e]very thing has to become thus personal and individuated to be imagined because there is no such thing as a public imagination"; to him, imagination is an "individuation"

¹ Herbert Read believes that sincerity, as a literary criterion, is quite problematic when it is applied to the modern literary scene, especially the disintegration within the self, and between the public and the private. Secondly, being 'self-conscious' in modern literature delimits sincerity. See Read's argument in chapter One entitled "The Cult of Sincerity," *The Cult of Sincerity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968) pp. 13-37.

(Spender 1963:53). Thus, such a precarious situation has its problems since the writer has to reconstruct a vision or an insight of an invented society based on the underlying patterns of real society, while remaining remote and different from it.¹ Creating a work is itself an act of nonconformity and non-consistency with social, religious and artistic ideas, but on the other hand, creativity implies an extinction of personality, loss of innocence and the initiation into an imaginative metaphysical realm, and that is the dilemma of Prufrock as an artist.²

The modern artistic creation, then, includes the reconstruction of society and the human self in order to explore the abyss of this self and to cause discordance between the needs and the wants of this self to escape the conditions of its existence.³ The self dramatizes its

¹ The individualistic vision according to Stephen Spender constitutes the creative element of modern literature that is "the individual vision of the writer who realizes in his work the decline of modern values while isolating his own individual values from the context of society" (Spender 1953:11). Spender claims that the modern writer "never forgets the modern context .. [but] is always stating it" in order to "create the more forcibly the visions of his isolation" (Spender 1953:11).

² See Robert Cook's argument on pages 8-9.

³ The change in the attempt of the modern self to be elusive or indeterminate or ambiguous did not emerge only as a result of modern scientific investigation of the human self, but it emerged from the modernist writers' need to maneuver within the literary text in order to establish and isolate a unique identity for the self. See Thomas Docherty's "Now, here, this" in *Literature and the Contemporary: Fiction, and Theories of the Present*, by Roger

skepticism and anxieties regarding the new social context and resorts to irony to surmount many difficulties regarding the perception of society and the reaction to the negativities of the age. The other aspect is the aesthetic autonomy that modern art tries to attribute to itself, since such autonomy suggests defiance against a simple reading and understanding of a literary work. 'Autonomy' means the independence of the literary work from the external reality in terms of imitation and the reflection of values because modernists, in essence, were trying to "decode" and "recode" reality (Jameson:2000, 183) to suit the contemporary time after the collapse of the realism. Therefore, Fredrick Jameson regards modernist works as "cancelled realistic ones" (Jameson, p. 183).

In other words, the modernist's task is to establish an alternative image of reality, while implicitly denoting that which is outside it in the physical realm. It is the social context that caused the modern writing's reactionary existence, and it is bound to refer to its social context by implication or negation. Hence, the modern writer produces and/or negates the reality he creates impartially- thus leaving the issues of ambiguity or contradiction for the reader to resolve. The process of writing in the modern context is complex since the aspects of reality are ambiguous. It is also problematic since the writer does not only have to invent the literary world, but he must

Lukhurst and Peter Marks (eds.) (Essex: Person Education Ltd., 1999), pp.50-62. Also, see *Modernist Patterns in Literature and Visual Arts* by Murray Roston (Houndmills: MacMillan 2000), which dwells upon the effect of modern science upon the literary imagination.

reconstruct it to undergo an unknown human experience, and to separate the individualistic vision from the social realm.

However, even when the Prufrockian artist tries to socially mingle, he fails, whereby his alienation intensifies. Hume explains that "an author can lay the blame for our warped perspectives on our membership in the human species, with all the culturally imposed assumptions which that brings" (Hume 1984:125). He is consciously aware of his appearance though he is a fashionable middle aged Edwardian, "My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin, /My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin" (Ll. 42-43). Such appearance/form is disturbing to him because it does not reveal his true character and intentions, since he has abandoned all the attempts to create a different literary work. Implicitly, Prufrock discarded the core. Therefore, he takes refuge in form, but it is antithetical when he expresses his discomfort and disgust with his appearance with the attempt to adjust to his modern fashionable life. Hence, the poem reflects the artist's ironic remarks about himself.

In addition, Prufrock is bald just like Conrad's Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. Both Prufrock and Kurtz lack essence, making them both hollow men. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" reflects this lack of essence in the lines: "Between the essence/ And the descent /falls the Shadow"(Ll. 88-90). The hollow men lead a life of passivity and inaction, for they wish to cross the river and be in "death's other kingdom"(L.46), but their passivity keeps them in "death's dream kingdom" (L.30). Prufrock's constant coding and recoding, constructing and

deconstructing is making him lose his essence (becoming bald) because in Yeat's words "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;"¹ (DiYanni 2000: 664, L.3). Therefore, they maintain their imaginative and physical sterility due to their lack of hope. Prufrock does not only represent the artist and his predicament in negotiating his status with society, but he also represents the literary work itself whose form might follow fashion but whose content is subject to severe criticism. The appearance of Prufrock symbolizes that literary text that is innovative yet unsatisfactory, because of the social demands of extreme creativity. Such a text tries to negotiate between internal sanity and external pressure.

Prufrock is not only that modern artist who suffers from an unbearable acceptance of his status within the society in which he lives, but also one who tries to vocalise an artistic justification of his literary fiasco and incompatibility within the modern age. In the first place, an artist like Prufrock feels that the modern context is sterile and bare just like his own mind (or his bald head). He believes that his literary dilemma is similar to that of the never-ending streets and roads that lead to an indefinite answer to the overwhelming question. His literary dilemma is based upon the inability to adjust to the life that he is required to live to lead a life that lacks substance or meaning, a life that is based upon hypocritical social pretensions: "There will be time, there will be time/ To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (Ll. 26-28).

The failure to mingle in society is probably why Prufrock, as an artist, fights against the modern attack on

¹ W.B. Yeats' "The Second Coming" printed in DiYanni

art. To him, art represents the stability and coherence of the past (tradition), and such stability and coherence is in sharp contrast to the futility and transience of the modern. To Terry Eagleton, Modernism is "a term at once expresses and mystifies a sense of one's particular historical conjuncture as being somehow peculiarly pregnant with crisis and change"(Eagleton 2000:367). He clarifies, "[i]t [Modernism] signifies a portentous, confused yet curiously heightened self-consciousness of one's own historical moment, at once self-doubting and self-congratulatory, anxious and triumphalistic together"(Eagleton 2000:367). He argues that "[i]t suggests at one and the same time an arresting and denial of history in the violent shock of the immediate present" (Eagleton 2000: 367). Hence, Prufrock's artistic battle is futile because the fashionable modernism in his society requires new criterion of artistic criticism away from the contemplation and extinction of individuality.

In his essay "The Metaphysical Poets", Eliot discusses the unified sensibility of the metaphysical poets "who incorporated their erudition into their sensibility" so that "their mode of feeling was directly and freshly altered by their reading and thought"(Eliot 1980:286). Eliot maintains that "a thought for Donne was experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience." (Eliot 1980:287). Eliot draws a similarity between the metaphysical and the modern poets, for he believes that the complexity of modern civilization will make the poets "dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning" (Eliot 1980:289). Prufrock is a modern artist who suffers from the disassociation of sensibility for he

cannot transform his thought into a poetical expression. He is disillusioned by the standards required by the modern life since his own senses cannot comprehend the context around him.

Time is a major concern for an artist like Prufrock who has to finish the creation of his would-be literary works. His refuge into his mind is a romantic escape from the passage of transient time. Prufrock is troubled by the passage of time. He attempts to maintain a modern appearance, to satisfy the tastes of the critics around him, yet the transient time leaves him lagging physically (in form) and spiritually (in content) in a time when he lacks the ability to produce a creative work of art to match those exhibited and criticised by his female companions. "For I have known them all already, known them all- / Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons, / I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" (Ll.49-51).

Further, Prufrock quotes from different sources, literary and non-literary to maintain the "stability" of his fading melancholic imagination.¹ Nevertheless, these sources, which represent tradition in contrast with modern talent, offer no immediate relief to his troubled perspective

¹ In *After Strange Gods A Primer of Modern Heresy*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), T.S. Eliot expands his notion of tradition into the social sphere. He thinks that "Stability" which means the existence of society, where there is balance among different forces, is one of the requirements for the maintenance of "Tradition" which will mean a healthy status of literature (Eliot 1934:19-20). Eliot thinks that such Tradition will prevent artistic novelty or originality from being used for its own sake (Eliot, p. 23).

of art and its deterioration on the hands of self-proclaimed feminist critics who "come and go/Talking of Michael Angelo" (L1.35-36), the Italian artist from the Renaissance era. Prufrock, as an artist, objects to the very idea of that unrefined cultural taste toward art and the manner in which women carelessly talk about Michael Angelo. Women are, in Stanley Fish's terminology, an "interpretive community" that uses gender-based standards of reading and criticism of literary texts. Fish explains that "[t]he assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the 'true text', but the truth will be that each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being" (Fish 2000:304). Consequently, Prufrock resents the way females treat art and the effect of commercialism upon literary appreciation, and the allusions (literary and non-literary) heighten Prufrock's disappointment and resentment of the prostitution of art by women.

Women are not only a part of Prufrock's unarticulated fear of criticism, but they are a part of his irritation and disgust at the prostitution of serious high art, like Sculpture. According to Roy Matthews and Dewitt Platt, Michael Angelo believed that Sculpture "was the art form whereby human figures were liberated from the lifeless prison of their surrounding material" and "compared the sculptor's creativity with the activity of God", thus making "[h]is art constituted a form of divine worship" (Matthews 2001:326). This process of using "surrounding material" in a new form to give "life" or a new "sense of reality" (Read 1963:223) invokes our previous comments on the constant process of coding and decoding, construction and deconstruction, and murdering and

creating as Prufrock refers to it. It also reflects the tension between past and present, between tradition and individual talent. Further, Matthews and Platt claim that "[c]entral to Michelangelo's artistic vision was his most celebrated image, the heroic nude male ... as a symbol of the human dignity" (Matthews 2001:326-327). Therefore, Prufrock objects to the very manner in which women talk about Michelangelo who is a serious Italian artist, and who depicts an anti-Prufrockian hero who is confident of his sexuality.

Prufrock fails to create a divine art like Michael Angelo's. His inability to create a single idea, theme in his mind or "[t]o have squeezed the universe into a ball/ To roll it toward some overwhelming question"(L1.92-93), is caused by, besides the aforementioned Oedipus Complex, the fragmentary life that he leads or is expected to comply with. Hence, he cannot find a logical explanation for the actions executed. To him, the fragmentary nature of life is the reason for his inability to create any meaningful work and for his behaviour and incoherent actions. Hume argues that "[w]e are taught how fallible our senses are through exposure to visions of reality that contradict the senses: dreams, psychotic experience, and drugs" (Hume 1984:125). The use of synecdoche is a part of that aforementioned fragmentation represented in Prufrock's antagonistic criticism of his female companions who interpret life through meaningless shallow social practices, such as measuring "life with coffee spoons" (L.51). This fragmentation does not only suggest his fear of women who are seen in parts, but also suggests futility in establishing

any meaningful relationship between the different stages of his life.

Prufrock's gender-biased opinions are confused for he cannot determine his own feelings about the other sex. He is an artist from a patriarchal society who embarks upon a visit to 'women', but he fears their criticism. Basically, he cannot assert his own gender superiority for he fears that women might misunderstand his artistic production. Therefore, Prufrock expresses his own contempt for the women's artistic tastes: "In the room women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo" (Ll.13-14). The words "women" and "talking" highlight Prufrock's contempt for the careless feminist treatment of art (Ricks 1994:12-18).

Prufrock also fears their opinion not only of his art but also of his appearance that seems utterly inappropriate or unfashionable, for they care for the form rather than the substance. He is anxious about labeling or gendering his own literary work by women, thus, increasing his own artistic dilemma, because their criticism will sever the relationship between the literary work and reality (Schweickart 2000:428-432). Nonetheless, and paradoxically, Prufrock will continue to visit these women. Prufrock's paradoxical relationship with women is similar to his relationship with his readers. Equating women with critics reflects Prufrock's artistic alienation that consciously or unconsciously is caused by his interconnected sexual fear and artistic impotency. Hence, Prufrock can neither assert his social superiority as a man or his artistic individuality as an artist.

Conclusion

The modern artist had to fight against the very basic foundations of his existence (his humanity, society, its structures and values) and to use them for his advantage, since modernism stood not only for the process of defining writing but also for redefining, specifying and searching for experiment with a new subject matter. This process made the creative task of the modernist writer a complex one, as previously discussed. The modernist writer was engaged in recoding and decoding objects of reality to escape the queer continuous transformation of reality. Reality could not be apprehended and the writer could not design his artifact upon the design of society itself since he considers it unstable. Therefore, he had to imagine it subjectively or to apply methods to find a sense of order and meaning in the collective, classless society in which he lives.

The writer had to alienate himself, in order to observe society from the outside and review its panoramic chaos. Obviously, the modern decoding and recoding of reality were part of the continuous attempt of the modernist writer to find a certain sense and order of the chaos within society. In the essay "Tradition and Individual Talent", Eliot argues that poetry does not aim to find new emotions, but to process the same emotions in poetry. For him, the spirit of the age in the poet springs from the ability to make "ordinary" emotions in poetry very modern (Eliot 1980:23). Prufrock is such an artist who creates and murders (the process of coding and recoding) because of his inability to find a compromise between his tendency to express new eccentric emotions on the one hand, and his need to prove himself as a traditional poet on the other.

Prufrock is caught between his desire to generate a "Writerly" text in which his identity and his moral responsibility are lost and yet fears generating a such a text might cause him to be misunderstood and misrepresented and, as a result, held accountable for his literary production. He wishes his text to be like the desert without shape or form or identity. His text seems to exist in a fluid state inside his brain subject to the influence of the "magic lantern" which generates a different temporal impression, meaning/shape/form thus making him an impressionist artist interested in reflecting reality not as it is but as it offered itself to him when the magic lantern cast its light upon it. Like Hamlet, Prufrock suffers from inability to make a decision (abulia) and from the Oedipus complex that makes him sexually impotent unable to achieve sexual or artistic fulfillment.

In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Macbeth utters the following lines after hearing of Lady Macbeth's death:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing. (*Macbeth* Act V, Scene V, Ll.23-27)¹

One can notice the resemblance between these lines and the lines (Ll. 72-76) from Eliot's "The Hollow Men" (Between the idea/ And the reality/ Between the motion/ And the act/ Falls the Shadow). Both quotations stress upon

¹ Printed in Kearns, George (ed.). *English and Western Literature*. (Illinois: Macmillan, 1987), p.182.

the inability of art to capture reality because of its elusiveness. Just like life is temporary, the meaning it acquires and the meaning the text acquires can only be a temporary transient one. In all their possible levels of meaning, the reader and the writer find themselves struggling with the task of making sense out of nonsense. Apparently, all human experiences, caused probably by the insignificance of man and the inability of human senses to grasp/ comprehend reality, amount to nothing. Shakespeare, though an Elizabethan writer, superbly describes the predicament of the modern man/artist who remains trapped and frustrated in an existential context characterised by futility and meaninglessness.

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